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US Government and DoD Response to the Ebola Crisis

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Dear MHS Colleagues,

The international health community is working closely together to help confront the outbreak of Ebola virus in the West African nations of Guinea, Liberia, Sierra Leone and, more recently, Nigeria.

As military medical professionals, we want to ensure that you are aware of the facts of the crisis, US government support to this effort, the Department of Defense’s role, and the resources available to you to communicate to your staff, your beneficiaries and your community. Your knowledge and voices as medical professionals can help keep military commanders and local communities fully informed with the facts about Ebola.






While this is a serious crisis affecting these West African nations, there is no current evidence that the Ebola virus poses a significant risk to the American public. No cases of Ebola have been identified in the US, beyond the two American citizens who were first diagnosed with the virus in West Africa before their transfer to Emory University Medical Center in Atlanta.

The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the Department of State each

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have important leadership responsibilities in the US response to this outbreak. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), an agency of the HHS, is serving as the nation's lead public health agency for responding to this crisis. The CDC updates its website on the Ebola virus daily (<http://www.cdc.gov/vhf/ebola/index.html>), and serves as the definitive source for public health information – both for clinicians and for the American public. Similarly, the National Institutes of Health continues its research efforts, and provides a wealth of resources on vaccine and treatment work being conducted: <http://www.niaid.nih.gov/topics/ebolaMarburg/research/Pages/default.aspx>

The Department of State, in addition to serving as the senior representative of the US government in foreign countries, provides US travelers with important health information that should be reviewed before traveling outside of the US. The most current Fact Sheet can be found at <http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/english/go/Ebola.html>

The Department of Defense is a supporting agency to the overall US effort – historically providing resources and logistical support through an established process in which non-military agencies request our assistance. The DoD in general, and the Military Health System (MHS) in particular, brings vital resources and expertise to combating infectious diseases, and we are coordinating closely with our civilian colleagues to assist host-countries that are battling this epidemic. Our expertise in long-term health surveillance of infectious disease, as well as medical research into the treatment and prevention of Ebola, makes us a vital member of US government effort.

The Armed Forces Health Surveillance Center (AFHSC) is at the forefront of tracking the Ebola outbreak to inform DoD and other decision makers on a range of matters from health protection of US citizens and military personnel in these countries to the effectiveness of intervention efforts.

Members of the US Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases (USAMRIID) have been providing support to diagnostic capabilities at the Liberian Institute of Biological Research in Liberia and the Kenema Government Hospital in Sierra Leone over the past year. USAMRIID also has provided the afflicted countries with more than 10,000 test kits as well as additional personal protective equipment.

In addition, USAMRIID and other components of the US Army Medical Research and Materiel Command (MRMC) continue their vital research into potential vaccines and therapies for Ebola. The Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA) and the DoD's Joint Program Executive Office for Chemical and Biological Defense have a significant role in funding this research. The experimental ZMapp treatment, recently in the headlines for its use with two infected American patients, was the result of sustained DoD investment into the prevention and treatment of Ebola.

In Cairo, Egypt, the US Naval Medical Research Unit Number Three has monitored infectious diseases in the West African region since 1946. These Navy researchers also have helped Armed Forces Liberia set up Ebola testing capabilities, while a Navy liaison to the World Health Organization is in Nigeria assessing risk and advising with a preparedness team.

Our global health engagement strategies are long-term and vital to the MHS mission. They offer substantial assistance both to our foreign partners and to agencies around the world. We are proud of the contributions that so many members of our military are making in response to this crisis in West Africa, and want to ensure that all of you are aware of the facts, the resources available throughout the government and the role of DoD in this effort.

Sincerely,

Jonathan Woodson, M.D., Assistant Secretary of Defense (Health Affairs)

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